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Perseverance of Quality in Digital Transformation of Education during Covid-19, in Private Higher Education Institutions in Bahawalpur Region: Issues and Solutions

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Abstract

Due to the fact that digital transformation in the field of education has become a vital means of survival in a new and transformed world as a result of Covid-19, all public and private sector institutions in Pakistan have been forced to close their campuses and implement online teaching. The study's major objectives were to identify problems and propose solutions while transitioning to online instruction. Study describes the difficulties and answers the problems experienced by teachers and students with regard to online teaching. Descriptive quantitative and qualitative research approaches were employed. To examine the concerns relating to instructors and students with relation to online teaching and learning, closed and open ended questionnaires for faculty and students as well as structured interviews from principals/administrators were employed. 06 principals/administrators, 60 faculty members and 300 post graduate students were randomly selected as study participants from 06 private higher education institutions in the Bahawalpur region. To summarize this research study, the researcher revealed thorough analysis of the findings extracted from the questionnaires/interviews of principals, teachers and students. Both teachers and students were first resistant to change; they eventually became enthused about the online learning process. The study was concluded from the results that quality of teaching and learning has deteriorated dramatically during Covid-19. The study presented some solutions in the form of recommendations.

Keywords: *Covid-19, Transformation, Digital Learning, Online Learning*

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1. INTRODUCTION

According to UNESCO 2020, "the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) epidemic has wreaked havoc across the globe. In the realm of education, this emergency has resulted in the widespread suspension of face-to-face operations at educational institutions in over 190 countries in order to limit the virus's spread and reduce its effects. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 1.2 billion students at all levels of education have quit attending face-to-face lessons by mid-May 2020".

The Pakistani higher education institutions, lecturers, and students have faced enormous obstacles as a result of the sudden, unprecedented, and unprepared move to online

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teaching and learning. This is similar to their colleagues around the world however it is intensified by the industry's precarious condition in Pakistan, International Association of Universities (2020).

To begin with, colleges/universities lacked an effective and efficient ICT infrastructure that could aid in the implementation of efficient online teaching. Private colleges/universities, who already have limited resources, have found it incredibly challenging to transition to remote learning. They quickly adopted a widely used online conferencing and conversing programme with a brief preparation seminar for instructors and students to familiarize and utilize for alternate instruction (Ahmed et al., 2020).

Although students who have access to digital devices and the internet may not be in the majority in most countries, assisting governments in establishing effective forms of online education will free up institutional capacities and resources, allowing them to focus on providing alternative learning methods for those students who do not. This annotated list of online educational resources for students, teachers, and parents is designed to aid governments and other education professionals in exploring and analysing various choices for continuing to educate pupils during the COVID-19 Pandemic Yusuf (2020). Distance learning during covid-19:

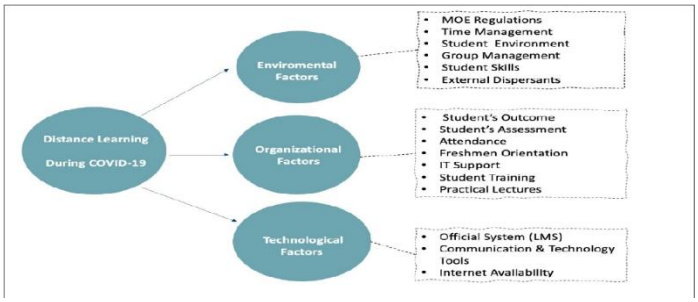

Figure 1. Distance Learning During COVID-19

Source: Tornatzky, L.G.; Fleischer, M.; Chakrabarti, A.K. Processes of Technological Innovation; Lexington Books: Lanham, MD, USA, 1990.

During the COVID-19 crisis, educational initiatives were taken.

i. The impact of continuing education on the curriculum

ii. Country preparation for online continuing education: extending the digital divide

iii. Tailoring evaluation methodologies

iv. The necessity for teachers and school administrators to be supported

v. The psychological and socio-emotional influence on the education community Quality and relevance

Focus on improving curricula content (particularly in relation to health and wellbeing) and specialised support for teachers, ensuring appropriate contractual and working conditions, teacher training for distance learning and the return to school, and socio-emotional support to work with students and their families, according to Batool et.all (2010).

Framework for transformation of education from face to face mode to online:

According to the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers, following are the key areas to transform the mode of education,

- The creation of instructional materials and strategies
- Preparedness programmes for teachers, students, and parents in the event of an emergency
- Quality control in the division of learning content into smaller components
- Development of an online support system
- Improving pupils' online learning abilities
- The Evolution of a New Online Evaluation System
- Providing students with educational materials
- Feedback collection

After reviewing the literature and feeling the sensitivity of the issue it is obvious to conduct a research study at the topic of "Perseverance of Quality in Digital Transformation of Education during Covid-19, in Private Higher Education Institutions in Bahawalpur Region- Issues and Solutions".

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study were, to:

- Investigate the challenges and issues faced by teachers in maintaining quality in the digital transformation of education at private higher education institutions in the Bahawalpur Region during Covid-19.
- Identify the obstacles and problems faced by students in pursuing excellence in the digital transformation of education at private higher

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education institutions in the Bahawalpur Region during Covid-19.

- Explore issues with shifting to online instruction and preserving educational quality in private higher education institutions in the Bahawalpur Region during Covid-19.
- Propose recommendations for moving from face-to-face to online instruction while maintaining educational quality in private higher education institutions in the Bahawalpur Region during Covid-19.

1.2 Research Questions

Research questions of the study were:

1. How face to face instruction can be transformed into online instruction?
2. Which measures can be made to maintain the quality of education in digital transformation of education during covid-19?
3. How teachers and students can be prepared to take the benefit of the educational transformation during covid-19?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Researches worldwide closely examine how education transformed digitally throughout the COVID-19 outbreak. According to UNESCO's 2020 report one billion two hundred million students worldwide stopped attending physical classes by mid-2020. When schools closed their physical classrooms they had to start teaching online despite facing various challenges and benefits. Educational institutions in Pakistan found this shift to remote learning exceptionally difficult because they lacked both advanced technology networks and funds (Ahmed et al., 2020). Teaching quality depends on overcoming these barriers through fresh ideas because technology issues block smooth online instruction.

Making digital learning possible required first solving challenges of internet and digital tool accessibility. Yusuf's 2020 study shows how technology availability differences expanded the digital gap especially in countries with low incomes. A large number of students learned online with problems because they had unstable internet connection, no suitable devices, and needed more digital experience. The digital gap expanded at private higher education institutions due to their limited resources. According to Tornatzky, Fleischer, and Chakrabarti (1990) organizations need strong technology innovation systems to solve these problems efficiently.

Teachers took charge of leading the move from regular classrooms to online education. Most educators required preparation and training but lacked these skills before online instruction started (Batool et al., 2010). Teacher development became essential when schools moved to digital education so learning institutions needed to keep offering professional learning sessions. Educators needed socio-emotional resources to withstand the pressure during online teaching according to Ahmed et al. in 2020 Our research team developed training plans that teach faculty how to use modern teaching methods and digital tools in online classes.

The switch to online teaching caused major mental and social effects on students and teachers across the board. According to the International Association of Universities (2020) the sudden move to online learning created stress and pushback for students and teachers. Students and teachers first resisted online learning but built enthusiasm as they continued to work in the digital space. To address student challenges mental health assistance paired with community development proved decisive. The connection between students and teachers through proper online learning structures drove motivation throughout Yusuf's 2020 research.

Educational content standards became a primary worry during pandemic times. According to the UNESCO ICT Competency Framework for Teachers (2020) teachers need to create material made specifically for online instruction. The plan divided education content into simple units while making learning resources interactive and fun for students. The framework promoted building fresh evaluation systems that work better at testing student learning results online. Learning quality improved consistently through feedback mechanisms that helped us find areas needing enhancement during the digital education process.

The research showed that students, teachers, administrators and policymakers must join forces to solve online learning problems. According to Ahmed et al. (2020) digital learning needs united plans from everyone to build helpful support networks for students and teachers. They delivered expert advice along with setting up emergency response plans and making learning materials available. These programs eased educational disruptions during the pandemic by helping everyone move to online learning faster.

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3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

This research was based on quantitative as well as quantitative methods. The use of quantitative and qualitative (QUAN and Qual) methodology was used to obtain data for this study, which focuses on students, teachers and principals/administrators of the higher education institutions in Bahawalpur division. Due to covid-19 spread throughout the country, it was near to impossible to collect the data personally and also face to face interaction was also not possible therefore it was decided by the researcher to delimit the sample by selecting two "Higher Education Institutions" (HEIs) from each district of Bahawalpur division. Two higher education institutions from each district (Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan) were selected as a sample applying the simple random sampling technique. 01 Principal/administrator, 10 teachers, 100 students from each higher education institution, those were available online, were selected as a sample of the study using simple random sampling technique. In this way 06 principals, 60 teachers and 300 students were selected as a sample of the study which made a total of 366 respondents in all.

The study was descriptive in nature therefore questionnaires were developed as the tools of research for students and teachers. Questionnaires for students and teachers were designed and finalized by getting the input from experts. After checking the reliability and validity of the questionnaires these were administered on teachers and students through their email addresses and also by using whatsapp numbers of some students. A five point likert scale, consisting of 30 questions about the 08 indicators of perseverance of quality in digital transformation of education during covid-19, questionnaires were developed both for teachers and students using five point likert scales.

Qualitative part of the study was consist of a semi structured telephonic interview was developed to collect data from the principals/administrators. Interview schedule was a semi structured interview. After getting the expert opinions about the tools of research the tools were applied on the sample and data was collected online in both forms that is in qualitative and quantitative form.

3.2 Data Analysis

Using qualitative data analysis methodologies, the qualitative portion of the data was critically analyzed. The data was separated and the codes were highlighted according to their relevance to the study's goals. The indicators were then combined with the codes. To extract the study's conclusions, each indicator was evaluated, interpreted, and described. The quantitative data was analyzed using simple percentages.

4. RESULTS

Table 1. Indicator-1: Adequate instructional materials and strategies were adopted during Covid-19

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	60%	35%	30%	46%	0%	10%	05%	06%	05%	03%
District Bahawalnagar	44%	33%	52%	49%	01%	10%	04%	07%	0%	01%
District Rahimyar Khan	52%	40%	35%	55%	02%	04%	08%	01%	03%	0%
Total	52%	36%	39%	50%	01%	08%	5.7%	4.7%	2.7%	1.3%

In response to the first indicator about the adoption of adequate instructional material and strategies during covid-19 period: most of the respondents showed strongly disagreed view about the asked question. Graph shows that the major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalpur. Only few respondents agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the question. Only a fractional part of the respondents showed their responses in agreed and strongly disagreed option.

Table 2. Indicator-2: Preparedness of teachers, students, and parents was significant in transformation of face to face learning to online mode

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	55%	61%	30%	40%	0%	0%	15%	6%	0%	0%
District Bahawalnagar	60%	65%	40%	32%	0%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%
District Rahimyar Khan	50%	63%	35%	33%	0%	4%	15%	01%	0%	0%
Total	55%	63%	35%	32%	0%	02%	10%	2%	0%	0%

Table shows the opinion of respondents about the second indicator of preparedness of students, teachers and parents was significant in transformation of face to face to online learning: A significant majority of the respondents showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. Table shows that the major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalpur. Only few respondents agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the question. No one of the respondents showed their responses in agreed and strongly disagreed option.

Table 3. Indicator-3: Quality was completely assured in the division of learning content into smaller components

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	01%	12%	02%	27%	0%	4%	71%	47%	26%	10%
District Bahawalnagar	0%	10%	04%	32%	02%	02%	65%	51%	29%	05%
District Rahimyar Khan	0%	06%	03%	30%	01%	0%	69%	55%	27%	09%
Total	0.3%	9.3%	03%	29.7%	01%	02%	68.3%	51%	27.3%	08%

Graph shows the opinion of respondents about the third indicator about the assurance of quality in the division of learning content into smaller components: Majority of the respondents showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. Graph shows that the major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar. Few respondents agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the question.

Table 4. Indicator-4: An Online student's support system was effectively developed to conduct online classes

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	37%	71%	58%	27%	01%	01%	01%	01%	03%	0%
District Bahawalnagar	40%	68%	55%	23%	0%	01%	04%	07%	01%	01%
District Rahimyar Khan	38%	69%	51%	29%	01%	0%	09%	02%	01%	0%
Total	38.3%	69.3%	54.7%	26.3%	0.7%	0.7%	4.7%	3.3%	1.7%	0.3%

Responding the fourth indicator about the development of online student's support system to conduct online classes: A significant part of the respondents showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. Graph shows that the major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar. A

reasonable number of respondents agreed and strongly agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the question.

Table 5. Indicator-5: Online support system is improving pupils' online learning abilities

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	10%	21%	30%	30%	01%	01%	40%	45%	19%	04%
District Bahawalnagar	15%	29%	40%	45%	02%	01%	42%	22%	01%	03%
District Rahimyar Khan	12%	27%	45%	43%	0%	2%	41%	26%	02%	02%
Total	12.3%	25.7%	38.3%	39.3%	01%	1.3%	41%	31%	7.3%	03%

In response of the fifth indicator about the improvement in learning abilities of the students due to the online support system: A major part of the respondents showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. Graph shows that the major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan. A reasonable number of respondents agreed and strongly agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the question.

Table 6. Indicator-6: New online evaluation system has been evolved and working efficiently

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	35%	30%	45%	52%	1%	1%	15%	14%	04%	03%
District Bahawalnagar	30%	35%	51%	58%	0%	3%	16%	03%	03%	01%
District Rahimyar Khan	28%	33%	53%	56%	0%	2%	17%	08%	02%	01%
Total	27.7%	32.7%	49.7%	55.3%	0.3%	2%	16%	8.3%	03%	1.7%

Response about the sixth indicator, new online evaluation system has been evolved and working efficiently: A significant part of the respondents showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. It is obvious from the graph that major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan. Few respondents agreed and strongly agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the indicator.

Table 7. Indicator-7: College/University is providing sufficient online educational materials to students

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	25%	40%	60%	52%	0%	01%	15%	07%	0%	0%
District Bahawalnagar	30%	38%	58%	53%	0%	02%	12%	08%	0%	01%
District Rahimyar Khan	28%	41%	54%	50%	0%	01%	17%	06%	01%	02%

Total	27.7%	39.7%	57.3%	51.7%	0%	1.3%	14.7%	03%	0.3%	1%

The graph depicts that the response about the seventh indicator, college/University is providing sufficient online educational materials to students: Majority of the respondents are in the opinion that they showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked question. The graph is also reflecting that major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan. Few respondents agreed and strongly agreed the statement. A small part of the respondents showed no response to the indicator.

Table 8. Indicator-8: Regular and proper feedback collection is being conducted through online system

	Percentage of Responses									
	SDA		DA		NR		A		SA	
	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S	T	S
District Bahawalpur	25%	28%	30%	45%	01%	01%	35%	18%	09%	08%
District Bahawalnagar	30%	35%	28%	51%	0%	01%	37%	08%	05%	05%
District Rahimyar Khan	27%	31%	33%	50%	0%	01%	34%	13%	06%	05%
Total	64%	73.3%	48.7%	48.7%	0.3%	01%	35.3%	13%	6.7%	06%

In response of the eighth indicator about the regular and proper feedback collection is being conducted through online system: Majority of the respondents is in the opinion that they showed strongly disagreed and dis-agreed view about the asked indicator. The graph is also reflecting that major part of the response received from the respondents of district Bahawalnagar and Rahimyar Khan. A significant part of respondents agreed and strongly agreed the statement. No any respondent showed no response to the indicator.

5. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The leading objective of the study was to identify issues with shifting to online instruction and preserving educational quality in private higher education institutions in the Bahawalpur Region during Covid-19. The researcher used the questionnaires and interview as a tool of research to gather data. The researcher asked about eight indicators for preservance of quality during transformation of education at higher level during covid-19 period. Majority of the respondent were of the view that the adoption of adequate instructional material and strategies during covid-19 period were not taken in to serious consideration by the institutions. A significant number of respondents considered that students, teachers and parents were not mentally, physically and financially ready to accept the change of mode of teaching learning from face to face to online method. Most of the respondents were of the opinion that division of learning content in to small units was not justified in any respect.

According to the opinion of a large number of respondents, higher institutions could not provide adequate, proper and inexpensive students support system to conduct online classes for different subjects. Due to lack of such support students online learning abilities could not be established. Online evaluation system was questioned by majority of the respondents. In the view of majority of respondents their institutions remained not good in providing of online learning materials. Most of the respondents were of the view that a proper, reliable and valid feedback system could not be developed and implemented by their institutions.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Proper training system may be introduced to teachers, students and parents for their mental and physical acceptance and expertise about the transformation of education to online mode
- Provision of online support system for the smooth conduction of online classes should be assured by the educational institutions
- Curriculum may be divided in to feasible and small units as per nature and demand of the subjects.

- Sufficient and relevant learning material should be provided to students by using online methods and gadget.

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